

N E W S R E L E A S E

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## SHOULD WE REALLY BE SENDING GUANTANAMO DETAINEES TO YEMEN?

On October 13, Saudi police prevented an imminent suicide bomb attack as two al Qaeda terrorists slipped across the border from Yemen. Notably, one of the would-be suicide bombers, Yousef Mohammed al Shihri, was a former Guantanamo Bay detainee released in 2007 to Saudi Arabia. He quickly left Saudi Arabia for Yemen, where he rejoined al Qaeda.

This is only the latest example of a former Guantanamo detainee returning to terrorism since their release. Just this year alone, the number of former detainees who have returned to terrorism increased by 13, from 61 to 74 – and these were all considered to be “low security” threats.

I am deeply concerned that this recidivism rate is only going to increase as the Obama Administration rushes to empty the detention facility at Guantanamo Bay to fulfill a campaign promise, especially when you consider that the remaining detainees are greater security risk.

Disturbingly, the list of those who have been cleared for release has been available to Guantanamo detainees for months, posted in common areas in both Arabic and Pashto. It has not, however, been made available to the American people or members of Congress, despite multiple requests.

This lack of transparency could perhaps be understood if these detainees were scheduled for release to our international allies, such as the United Kingdom, Ireland and Australia. Each have the necessary resources to properly oversee any former detainees.

What is unacceptable, though, is that the Obama Administration is considering releasing detainees to unstable countries that are ill-equipped to receive terrorist detainees. Yemen, Afghanistan, Somalia, Tunisia, Algeria, Syria, Uzbekistan, Libya, Azerbaijan and Tajikistan are among the countries on the list of possible places to send former detainees.

I am particularly troubled with the administration's intention to send up to 27 detainees to Yemen. If Saudi Arabia, which has a robust mandatory detainee rehabilitation program, cannot prevent former detainees from returning terrorism, how can we expect the weak, destabilized Yemeni government to be able to attempt monitor former detainees.

In September 2008, another former Guantanamo Bay detainee, Said Ali al Shihri, helped orchestrate the terrorist attack on the U.S. embassy in Sanaa, Yemen, where 10 guards and civilians were killed. Since then, al Qaeda's posture in Yemen has grown stronger with the merger of the Saudi and Yemeni arms of al Qaeda into one group – al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula – with Yemen as its base for training and operations.

We have seen the consequences of these developments. Last August, a Yemeni al Qaeda loyalist detonated a suicide bomb in an attempt to kill Saudi Prince Mohammed bin Nayef. He was able to gain access to the prince by pretending to be an al Qaeda defector before detonating the explosions.

As our State Department noted in its 2008 Country Reports on Terrorism, "the security situation in Yemen deteriorated significantly over the past year as al Qaeda and Yemen increased its attacks against Western and Yemeni Government institutions."

Yemen also is now home to radical cleric Anwar al Awlaki, who advised several 9/11 hijackers. Recent news reports indicate he also had a relationship with alleged Fort Hood assailant Major Nidal Malik Hasan.

Once a detainee is released, there is no going back. I have repeatedly implored President Obama and his administration to halt further releases of detainees to Yemen. As we have seen, the consequences of sending dangerous detainees to an unstable country are grave. The safety and security of the American people – military and civilian – must be the administration's top priority in determining whether or where to release any detainee.